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„Incestuous“ Marriage in Achaemenid Iran: Myths and Realities

Introduction

Greek and Roman authors frequently allude to the unusual marital customs of the Persians of the Achaemenid era,¹ as well of course as those of later centuries. They repeatedly assert that it was allowable for Persians to have sexual intercourse with, or to marry, mothers, daughters or other close family members, relationships that were strictly forbidden in the Greek and Roman world. Not surprisingly, these allegations have elicited much comment from modern scholars.² Indeed, it is often accepted that marriages with very close kin were tolerably common in the ruling Achaemenid family, as well as in other noble families.³ Some even claim that they occurred much more generally in Iran at least by the fourth century BC.⁴ Can this really have been the case?

Many of those who accept, or partly accept, the Greek and Roman testimony for the Achaemenid period believe that it refers to Zoroastrian marital practice. To support their case, they turn to the texts which provide information about the marriage customs of the much later Sasanian era (third to seventh centuries AD) – a hazardous approach.⁵ For these later centuries, when Zoroastrianism, often described as the state religion, was a very major force in Iran, exercising a far greater influence than ever before, there is certainly a considerable body of evidence relating to next-of-kin mar-

¹ In the following pages I use the term „Achaemenid“ loosely in reference to the Persian empire from Cyrus the Great to Darius III.

² The majority of those who treat this issue deal with the entire pre-Islamic period (6th century BC to 7th century AD). The most useful of recent discussions include Williams (1990) 126–137 and de Jong (1997) 424–432, general introductions; Macuch (1991), primarily on the Sasanian era; Scheidel (1995) and (2002), brief comparisons of Iranian practices with those alleged for Roman Egypt, Scheidel (1996) being important particularly on the question of the biological consequences. The more significant earlier accounts are those of West (1882), Slotkin (1947), Spooner (1966), Sidler (1971) 86–149, Frye (1985), along with Chadwick (1979) and Lee (1988), both dealing with late antiquity (for further bibliography see Scheidel [1996] 167). However, for the Achaemenid era the most important comments are those of Brosius (1996) esp. 45–47, 66–69. On the history of this period in general see above all Briant (1996).

³ E.g. by Spooner (1966) 55; Briant (1990) 95 and (1996) 104–105; Herrenschildt (1994) 117.

⁴ Bidez/Cumont (1938) 78–79; Boyce (1979) 54 and (1982) 75–77; Perikhanian (1983) 644; Orsi (1987) 297–98. Goodenough (1949), on the other hand, refers to a number of discussions which reject the statements of the Greek and Roman authors. For more recent criticism of their testimony see Brosius (1996) 45–47, 66–69; cf. also Wiesehöfer (1996) 84–85 and Nashat (2003) 23–24.

⁵ See, for example, Bidez/Cumont (1938) 78–79; Boyce (1982) 75–77; Herrenschildt (1994); Scheidel (2002) 35–39 (cf. his earlier accounts, cited above in n. 2); de Jong (1997) 424–432. Briant (1990) 95 and (1996) 104–105, however, emphasises political and economic factors, without reference to Zoroastrianism or religion. Brosius (1996) 46 n. 23 rightly criticises the use of Sasanian evidence.

riage (*xwēdōdah*).⁶ There is clear testimony, too, that it was actively encouraged by the Zoroastrian priesthood. Moreover, our information about it in this period comes not only from outsiders (Greeks, Romans, Syrians and others). It is provided by Pahlavi (Middle Persian) religious and legal writings.⁷ These indicate the types of kinship involved, making it clear that *xwēdōdah* includes marriage to mother, daughter, sister or half-sister.⁸ They outline the many blessings it confers, although how frequently it actually occurred is a matter of considerable doubt.⁹ Some marriages, it is clear, were marriages in name only, arrangements to ensure the existence of an heir.¹⁰

While there is substantial documentation for Sasanian marital customs, as well as for Zoroastrianism in general in this period, the situation is wholly different in regard to the much earlier, and very different, Achaemenid era (sixth to fourth centuries BC). Singularly little is known about the entire early history and spread of the Zoroastrian faith.¹¹ However, it is clear that the religious practices and the religious climate of Achaemenid Iran were by no means identical to those of Sasanian times. Furthermore, the evidence for next-of-kin marriage, which was perhaps not in its origins a Zoroastrian custom,¹² is supplied solely by the Graeco-Roman world. For these centuries there is no Iranian evidence.¹³

The Greek and Roman testimony naturally has to be approached with great caution. From the early fifth century BC onwards, Greek references to foreigners can reveal more about Greeks themselves than about the peoples described. Although attitudes are by no means uniformly negative, Greeks tend to regard non-Greeks not only as very different, but as polar opposites, utterly lacking in self-restraint and other fundamental Greek virtues, and prone to violate any taboo. Their comments about the Persians of the Achaemenid era, who were in many years, in addition, their deadliest foes, may stem from bias, if not from active hostility.¹⁴ Romans too, following closely in Greek footsteps in this regard, often express similar prejudices about the Persians of the Achaemenid empire and also about the later Parthians.¹⁵ Besides, the specific allegation of incest, we need to bear in mind, is one that can be directed in the Graeco-Roman world against any indivi-

⁶ One of the Middle Persian forms of Avestan *khvāēvadatha* (see n. 8 below). For a useful overview of Sasanian Zoroastrianism see Wieschöfer (1996) 199–216, who rejects such labels as „state religion“ (214).

⁷ The principal sources include chapter 80 of the 3rd book of the *Dēnkard* (9th c. AD), tr. de Menasce (1973) 85–90; chapter 8 of the Pahlavi *Rivāyat* Accompanying the *Dādestān ī Dēnīg* (9th–10th c. AD), tr. Williams (1990) 10–17; for legal issues the collection of judicial decisions known as the *Mādīgān ī Hazār Dādistan* (7th c. AD; German tr. Macuch [1993]; Eng. tr. Perikhanian [1997]). Other texts are cited by Macuch (1991). Although the sources named above date from the 7th to the 9th or 10th centuries AD, they contain much material that is considerably older. Non-Iranian sources date from the 3rd century AD.

⁸ For discussion of the definition see Macuch (1991) 143–144. In the *Avesta*, first written down in the Sasanian period, but transmitted orally from very much earlier times, as Kellens (1989) notes, the degree of kinship involved in *khvāēvadatha* is nowhere specified (Macuch [1991] 142–143).

⁹ Cf. Scheidel (2002) 38, who suggests that possibly it was infrequent (cf. also Choksy [2003] 51–52).

¹⁰ See Perikhanian (1983) 649, 653–655; Macuch (1991) 144–145; ead. (1995); ead. (2003).

¹¹ Wieschöfer (1996) 94–101 and Sancisi-Weerdenburg (1996) provide useful brief accounts of the problems posed by the sources.

¹² Boyce (1982) 75–77 alludes to some of the theories about its origins.

¹³ The earliest Near Eastern evidence belongs to the Parthian era (1st century BC); see below (App. I and n. 132) and Bigwood (2008) 260–262.

¹⁴ For recent discussions of Greek attitudes to the Persians of this period see in particular: Briant (1989); Hall (1989); Miller (1997) and (2003); Bichler/Rollinger (2003); Rollinger (2006).

¹⁵ For their attitudes to the former see Paratore (1966) and Rosivach (1984); for their views of the latter see Sonnabend (1986); Schneider (1998) and (2007); Lerouge (2007).

dual (or group of individuals) whom it seems desirable to malign.¹⁶ It does not necessarily reflect any reality.

In the following pages I take a fresh look at marriages between very close family members in the Achaemenid period. My concern is with two main questions – first of all with the nature of the Greek and Roman evidence, and secondly with the frequency of the practice. Part I provides the background. It examines the general statements made about next-of-kin unions by Greek and Roman writers, including a number who were not contemporary with the Achaemenid empire, but belonged to Hellenistic times or later. As will become clear, the post-Achaemenid authors referred to here are ones whose comments have no value as evidence for the practices of their life-times, a point that requires some emphasis.¹⁷ They draw their information from an earlier epoch.¹⁸ However, their statements, along with those of their predecessors, illustrate the climate of belief in which tales of individual marriages between close family members were generated.

In part II I discuss, or at least refer to, all the next-of-kin marriages or sexual relationships of named Iranians of the Achaemenid era that are alleged in the sources (including one or two individuals from pre-Achaemenid times). Brosius (1996), who treats such alliances in the context of royal marriages in her book on Persian women, has of course commented on the most important of the tales that I consider.¹⁹ But she does not deal with all of them,²⁰ or with the general references that I discuss in part I. Moreover, her point of view on the question has not always received the attention from recent scholars that it deserves.²¹ My account, therefore, which naturally builds in a number of ways on

¹⁶ Allegations of sexual impropriety (including incest) are a standard feature of Greek and Roman political invective; see Süss (1910) 249–250, 259–262; Koster (1980) and Tatum (1993) 44 n. 34, who gives further bibliography for Rome (for allegations of incest against specific Greeks or Romans see below [beginning of part II]). Incest is, in addition, an alleged practice of „uncivilised“ peoples; see, for example, Eur. Andr. 173–175 („barbarians“); Strab. 4.5.4 (Irish); Tert. nat. 1.16.4–5 and apol. 16–17 (Macedonians). It is also (notoriously) alleged of the early Christians (cf. below n. 34).

¹⁷ The argument of Sidler (1971) 144–145, for example, assumes that post-Achaemenid Greek and Roman authors refer to the period contemporary with the author. Frye (1985) 449 seems to assume the same about some of them.

¹⁸ It is not of course always immediately apparent which era or which ethnic group an individual post-Achaemenid author has in mind (if indeed he reflected on this question). Part of the problem clearly stems from the ambiguity of the word „Persians“. This can be an ethnic label, designating the inhabitants of Parsa (Greek *Persis*), the homeland of the Persians. As such it is appropriate in any century irrespective of the ruling dynasty. But the same term can also be a political designation, applicable to members of the empire ruled by the „Persians“, i.e. the Achaemenid empire, or of course, in writers of the 3rd century AD or later, the Sasanian empire. In addition, from the 1st century BC onwards, Greek and Roman authors tended to endow the ruling Parthians with many of the characteristics of their Achaemenid predecessors; see, for example, Schneider (2007) 70–75 and Lerouge (2007) 339–349 and elsewhere. In this period terms such as „Persian“ or „Mede“ may replace „Parthian“; Schneider (2007) 70 with n. 91 gives references to Cicero and the Augustan poets; cf. Rosivach (1984) 3 n. 2. Cf. also Chauvot (1992) on the use of „Parthian“ for „Persian“ and vice versa in authors of the 4th century AD writing of the Sasanian era.

¹⁹ Brosius (1996) 45–47, 66–69, 81, 195 (cf. 204–205), differing often in details from the account given below.

²⁰ Some, it will become clear, are ancient or modern fictions, and one, in addition, is not a marriage within the royal family.

²¹ A number of them (all believers in what the sources state) make no reference to her comments; see, for example, Moreau (2002) 97 n. 1; Scheidel (2002); Hjerrild (2003) 167–169; Lenfant (2004) 289–290 n. 776. Ogden (1999) 125–127, on the other hand, and Lerouge (2007) 341 with n. 92, reject her position. However, neither takes account of all her arguments or all of the evidence.

the information provided in her book as a whole, aims to give support to her basic contention that there is good reason to be sceptical about much of the evidence for next-of-kin alliances in the period under discussion.

The marriages and sexual unions with which I deal are those between son and mother, father and daughter, full siblings and half-siblings.²² In Greece such unions were unacceptable, except that in Athens and seemingly in general in the post-Classical Greek world, marriage between half-siblings with the same father was allowable, although not particularly common. In Rome, where marriage within the family was more strictly avoided, all of the above-mentioned unions were unlawful.²³

Part I: General References to Next-of-Kin Marriage

We learn from Greek and Roman authors about a number of aspects of marriage and the family in Achaemenid Persia, although what they say applies only to the upper classes; we have no evidence for the marriages of 'ordinary' Persians.²⁴ Our sources tell us, for example, that polygamy was not unusual,²⁵ that in addition to wives a man might have a number of concubines, and that it was highly desirable to have many sons (Hdt. 1.135–136.1; Strab. 15.3.17). We hear, too, about one or two marriages between such relatives as first cousins or uncle and niece (cf. below n. 114). However, the marital arrangement that particularly attracts attention in the ancient world is the alleged practice of marrying, or having a sexual relationship with, one's closest family members.²⁶

²² The terms for full siblings in Greek and Roman sources can of course also mean half-siblings; cf. Ogden (1999) XXX n. 1; for *adelphos/ē* see Thompson (1971) 112; Dickey (1996) 88; Huebner (2007) 26 n. 57; for the Latin equivalents see OLD s. v. *frater* 1a and *soror* 1a and 1b; Mülke 1996, 41–44 discusses *adelphos/ē homopatris/bomomētrios* ('half-sibling on the side of father/mother'). Many references to sibling unions in our texts may thus be to unions of half-siblings.

²³ For what was permitted in Athens see MacDowell (1978) 86; for the Greek city-states in general and for the Hellenistic period see Shaw (1992) 270–272. According to Phil. (de) spec(ialibus) leg(ibus) 3.22 marriage between uterine half-siblings (but not half-siblings with the same father) was permitted at Sparta. But there is no corroborating evidence and the rhetoric of the whole section (spec. leg. 3.13–23; discussed below) does not enhance its credibility; cf. the doubts of Vèrilhac/Vial (1998) 94. For what was permissible under Roman law see Treggiari (1991) 37–39. For some of the many definitions of incest which differ from those discussed here see Vèrilhac/Vial (1998) 91–92 with n. 162.

²⁴ Briant (1990), emphasising that Herodotus and later authors write almost exclusively of upper class Persians.

²⁵ On royal polygamy see Brosius (1996) 35–37.

²⁶ App. II lists the more important general allusions to such practices (all of them probably referring to the Achaemenid period). It also lists the more significant references to the specific marriages discussed in part II. Not surprisingly, however, the terminology which is employed varies in accordance with the context and the author's purposes. On the whole in the Greek general statements we find expressions (such as *mignysthai*) which apply to sexual intercourse (we do not of course possess the actual words of Xanthus, Ctesias, Antisthenes or Sotion). The exceptions are Phil. spec. leg. 3.13, Plut. mor. 328c, Lukian. (de) sacr(ficiis) 5 and S. Emp. pyr(rhōneioi hypotheseis) 1.152 and 3.205, where we find terms such as *agesthai* and *gamein*. These appear to refer to marriage here, as they do normally (although *gamein*, especially in late authors, can be a term merely for intercourse; see Shipp [1979] 187–188). Sidler (1971) 145 argues that the introduction of marriage terminology in such later sources is an indication of the spread of next-of-kin marriage in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. However, as well as erroneously assuming that all authors describe contemporary practices (cf. above n. 17), he also excludes from consideration sources which describe royal (or noble) alliances. Many of the latter (e.g. Hdt. 3.31; Plut. Art. 23, 26, 27) refer to marriage and use language appropriate to this.

From the fifth century BC onwards, a large number of authors — historians, ethnographers, philosophers, Church Fathers — comment on this habit, usually briefly and in a very general way, without naming names. The details that they provide are superficially very similar. However, they are not identical. In addition, individual authors differ in their knowledge of Achaemenid Iran and in their motives for commenting. A discussion of these issues will illustrate the quality of the evidence and give us a preliminary indication of whether ancient beliefs about such unions coincide at all with the realities.

Few of those who make statements about next-of-kin marriage had personal knowledge of Achaemenid Iran, although one or two were in a reasonably good position to acquire reliable information, had this been their aim. One of these is Herodotus in the fifth century BC, whose extensive travels included journeys in the western parts of the Achaemenid empire and whom I discuss below in part II. A second is Xanthus (FGrH 765) from Persian-controlled Lydia. His history of Lydia was written at about the same time as Herodotus' „Histories“, but survives only in a very small number of citations by later authors.²⁷ As Clement of Alexandria reports in the 2nd century AD (strom[ateis] 3.11.1 = F 31), Xanthus claimed that to have sexual relations with mother, daughter and sister was a practice of the Magi (priests in west Iran of uncertain origin).²⁸ However, exactly what he said or how much is not known, nor can one be certain of his reliability. In the scraps that remain of his history there is, as Georges (1994) 122–123 notes, an obvious enthusiasm for sensational tales, including tales of peculiar sexual practices; one Lydian king, for example, is alleged to have castrated women to use as eunuchs (F 4a = Athen. 12.11, 515d–e). Xanthus also related, it should be observed, the story of at least one next-of-kin relationship — the disastrous love of Assaon for his daughter Niobe (F 20a = Parthen[ius] *Amatoriae narrationes* 33) and may have related others similar to it.²⁹

A generation after Xanthus, another historian, Ctesias, a physician at the Persian court for a number of years at the turn of the 5th century BC, had even better opportunities to find out the facts. However, he too, like Xanthus, is a problem. His history of Persia, like his predecessor's work, is known only from what later authors have preserved, its reliability, at least for early times, being very much in doubt.³⁰ On the question of marital customs he allegedly reported that Persians have sexual relations with their mothers „knowingly and without a qualm“. At least this is what is stated in the 2nd century AD by Tertullian (nat. 1.16.4 = FGrH 688 F 44a). However, the very obvious moralising is surely Tertullian's contribution.³¹ In addition, the statement is certainly an inadequate

²⁷ Herter (1967) 1372–1373 discusses the problems of Xanthus' date and relationship to Herodotus.

²⁸ For the many theories of their origin see de Jong (1997) 387–394. Kingsley (1995) esp. 179–185 comments on a number of the difficulties raised by Clement's citation.

²⁹ On FGrH 765 F 20a see Lightfoot (1999) 542–545. Xanthus may also be the source of the story of the brother-sister marriage of Lyde, related by Xenophilus FGrH 767 F 1 (= Anon. de mul[lieribus] 9) and by Nic(olaus) Dam(ascenus) FGrH 90 F 63 (where the king is Sadyattes rather than Alyattes); cf. Gera (1997) 159.

³⁰ The standard edition (to which my references apply) is that of Jacoby (FGrH 688), whose study (1922) is the most important of earlier discussions. Of the many recent contributions the most useful for all questions, including textual ones, is the excellent edition of Lenfant (2004). Schmitt (2006) discusses the Iranian personal names. On the problem of the length of Ctesias' stay in Persia see Lenfant (2004) X with nn. 17–19; on the reliability of the earlier part of his history see below n. 68.

³¹ It is much reduced in a similar reference in his *Apologeticum* (9.16 = FGrH 688 F 44b). Some commentators believe that Tertullian refers to a marriage of Cyrus the Great to Amytis. However, this does not harmonise with Ctesias' tale that Cyrus merely treated her as a mother (F 9.1; cf. Lenfant [2004] 290 n. 776); she is not Cyrus' biological mother. It is not in fact known whether or not Ctesias referred to any specific mar-

representation of what the original related, as we can tell from other fragments. Whatever Ctesias said about unions of son with mother, he also referred to half-sibling, if not to full sibling marriages (see part II below).

Although we do not know exactly what Xanthus or Ctesias wrote, it is clear that some authors had good opportunities to acquire information about Iranian customs, even though they may have failed to make adequate use of them. This group, however, is very much in the minority. Most of those who comment on next-of-kin unions appear merely to repeat the statements of others, with very little attempt, moreover, to elaborate on this habit or to explain it. Information of this kind after all soon found its way into collections of the remarkable practices of non-Greek peoples, into those, for example, made by sophists and philosophers intent on demonstrating that human laws and customs are purely relative and have no universal application.³² We meet Persian next-of-kin unions, along with cannibalism and other barbaric habits, in the *Dissoi Logoi* (90 [Diels/Kranz]) 2.15, a work usually dated to the end of the 5th or beginning of the 4th century BC (e.g. by Robinson [1979] 41). At a much later date they are found in the writings of Sextus Empiricus (late 2nd or early 3rd century AD), in his account, for example, of the 10th Mode of Scepticism (pyr. 1.145–163 at 1.152). Here Sextus, like the author of the *Dissoi Logoi*, relates an assortment of the unattractive customs and beliefs that rule the lives of other peoples, all of it being traditional material, drawn from a wide range of sources from Homer onwards.³³ Later in the work (pyr. 3.205), in a similar but fuller list, we are given a second reference to Persian marital practice (on Sextus' sources on this subject see below).

Clearly next-of-kin marriage becomes early on a stock example of Persian barbarity, one author taking it over without further investigation from another, or learning it in the course of his rhetorical training. By the end of the 2nd century AD it is employed by Christian apologists and moralists as a standard illustration of pagan immorality. Even the variations that appear can be traditional. Tertullian, for example, links Persian incest and the story of Oedipus (nat. 1.16.4–5; cf. apol. 9.16).³⁴ Minucius Felix (31.3) does not name Oedipus. However, when he alludes to incest as a theme of tragedy, he clearly has this tale in mind. In addition, his simplistic contrasting of mother-son unions in Persia with sister-marriage in Egypt is to be found in other authors as well.³⁵ Such innovations are mere embroidery on a basic theme. Tertullian and Minucius Felix no more supply new evidence or contemporary testimony than does Sextus Empiricus.

riage of son and mother; on the story of Parysatis and Cyrus the Younger see below (part II). What the original contained is far from fully known.

³² Chadwick (1979) 146–153 provides a useful survey of the evidence.

³³ Annas/Barnes (1985) 157–158. Accounts of the Modes can differ in the order in which they are presented and in the examples provided. Sextus' allusion in pyr. 1.152 is to son-mother unions; the version of Diog. Laert. 9.83 refers to father-daughter alliances.

³⁴ For parallels see below. Barnes (1971) 55 dates both works of Tert. to c. 197 AD and notes (196), in a discussion of his general erudition, the possible use of *florilegia*. The source of the anecdote about the first performance of the *Oedipus* in Macedonia and Macedonian incest is unknown. *Oedipus* is of course introduced as part of the author's reply to the allegations of incest levelled against the Christians. For his echoing of Athenagoras' *Thyesteia deipna*, *Oidipodeious mixeis* (leg [atio pro Christianis] 3.1) with his *tragoedia Thyestae vel Oedipodis* (Tert. nat. 1.7.27) see Schneider (1968) 127, 165, 183.

³⁵ See below n. 47. The relative dating of the accounts of Tertullian and Minucius Felix is controversial, although clearly one was a model for the other; for bibliography on both sides of the question see Price (1999) 112.

Other variations, however, deserve more attention, for they underline the lack of connection between what is stated and what is historical reality. It is surely significant, for example, that of the three forms of next-of-kin marriage (with sister, with daughter, with mother) many refer only to the last-mentioned type, with one or two more noting, in addition, liaisons of father and daughter. In other words in a substantial number of cases there is no reference at all to alliances of siblings.³⁶ Yet, as will be seen in part II, we have good evidence that sibling marriages, or at least half-sibling ones, occurred in the royal family (and perhaps in other noble families), and much weaker evidence for marital relationships between parent and child.

It is obvious that many of our sources place disproportionate emphasis on the unions felt in the ancient world to be especially abhorrent.³⁷ Furthermore, while they appear to agree with each other, they display a certain lack of unanimity over the identity of the alleged participants. In some authors after all the habit is ascribed only to Magians – e.g. in Xanthus (FGrH 765 F 31; in the citation of Clement of Alexandria), as noted above, the biographer Sotion in the 2nd century BC (according to Diog. Laert. 1.7), Catullus (90) in the following century, Strabo (15.3.20) in the Augustan period and others as well.³⁸ Some, on the other hand, talk only of Persians, without any attempt to discriminate between groups or social classes.³⁹

Two Alexandrian authors, Philo in the first part of the first century AD and Clement, writing towards the end of the following one, are more precise and their comments are worth analysing at greater length. The former in the third book of *De specialibus legibus*, includes, as part of his discussion of Jewish marital law, an elaborate denunciation first of Persian son-mother unions (spec. leg. 3.13–19), and after this of Egyptian sister-marriage (3.22–25). In the initial section of his attack he directs attention to „Persians of the ruling class“ (*hoi en telei Persōn*).⁴⁰ But what is meant by „Persians“ and from whom did he acquire his information? Although Colson (1937) 632–633 has suggested that for Philo „Persian“ could be a substitute for „Parthian“ and that the reference is possibly to the contemporary

³⁶ Nine of the sixteen passages listed in the first part of Appendix II refer only to mother-son unions in Persia. (My figures, which do not count the passages enclosed in square brackets, include only one reference per author, except where he uses more than one source.) Only five refer to sibling unions.

³⁷ Cf. Rudhardt (1982) 750–751, who suggests that the parent-child unions of Greek myths, especially those involving son and mother, aroused greater horror in Greece than sibling alliances.

³⁸ Cf. also Tatian(us) (oratio) ad Graec(os) 29 (2nd century AD). Strab. 15.3.15 states that his account of the rituals of a Magian community in Cappadocia comes from personal observation. His comment, however, on Magian marriage (15.3.20) is appended to his description of Persian customs in general, and this material (i.e. 15.3.13–14 and 15.3.16–20), as he indicates, comes from books. Some of it could derive ultimately from 4th century BC accounts, as does the description of Persis and Susis in 15.3.1–12, where Strabo cites Polycleitus, Nearchus, Onesicritus and Aristoboulus (on the sources in general for book 15 see Biffi [2005] 18–30). Somewhat earlier, Catullus in the middle of the 1st century BC may also be drawing on ethnographical literature (cf. Graf [1997] 37). For the melting of the *omentum* (90 line 6), for example, cf. Strab. 15.3.13, seemingly from a written source (despite de Jong [1997] 130–131). However, the claim that a Magian must be the product of a son-mother union (line 3), which has no parallel elsewhere, could well be Catullus' fiction, as Syndikus (1987) 71 suggests.

³⁹ Conon FGrH 26 F 1.9 (Augustan period), however, specifies Medes as well as Persians. In the 2nd century AD Lucian (sacr. 5) has Persians and Assyrians (the latter almost certainly the Assyrians of the literary tradition; cf. below [part II] on Semiramis). A century earlier, Phil. de prov(identia) 1.85 (Hadas-Lebel [1973] 196) refers to son-mother relationships as a Scythian custom. For S. Emp. pyr. 3.205 the practice is one of Magians in particular, but also of other Persians.

⁴⁰ There is no reference to Magians, of whom Philo seems to have a high opinion (cf. spec. leg. 3.100 and Quod omn[is] prob[us] liber sit] 74).

Parthian rulers, this does not appear to be the case.⁴¹ It seems much more likely that the allusion is indeed to „Persians“ and that Philo denounces practices that he has heard of in connection with Persians of the Achaemenid era. As Colson himself notes, in other works (*Quod Deus sit immutabilis* 174; [De] Ios[epho] 136; cf. *Legatio ad Gaium* 10 and 256) Philo clearly distinguishes between the Persian rulers of the past and the current Parthian dynasts, his only certain references to Parthians. His Persians, too, in a number of other passages, are unambiguously Persians of the Achaemenid era, an era of which he has some knowledge.⁴² In no case does „Persian“ in Philo clearly mean „Parthian“.

In addition, some of the details of the passage that we are considering, along with the very prominent role that it gives to Oedipus, suggest a connection with Greek discussions of the 4th and 3rd centuries BC — with the famous, or rather infamous condoning of incest (and of cannibalism) by some Cynics and early Stoics.⁴³ There are in particular some obvious points of contact between what Philo says and what Sextus Empiricus reports of Zeno’s defence of Oedipus’ marriage and of the approval of next-of-kin relationships expressed by Chrysippus.⁴⁴ Besides, when Sextus ascribes to the latter the statement that such unions were customary for many peoples (math. 11.192 and pyr. 3.246; a comment which surely includes Persians), this strongly suggests that the linking of the Oedipus story and the Persians occurred not just in Philo, but in Sextus’ early Stoic sources.⁴⁵ A reference to Persian (and to Egyptian) marital practice in another passage of Sextus (pyr. 3.205) in fact is followed immediately by explicit references to the views of Zeno and of Chrysippus on incest.⁴⁶

⁴¹ For the interchange of the labels „Persian“ and „Parthian“ cf. above n. 18. Even if Philo believed that the practice was a current one, this does not mean that his information comes from his own times.

⁴² In Ios. 133, *Quod omn. prob. 132, de somniis* 2.117–119, de prov. 1.65 (Hadas-Lebel) Philo refers to well-known episodes of Achaemenid history. Cf. spec. leg. 3.100, which seemingly refers to Magians as educators of Persian kings in a manner that harmonises with Greek accounts of their role in Achaemenid times; see Plat. Alc. 1 122a; Cic. div. 1.91; Nic. Dam. FGrH 90 F 67. In addition, the fratricides (and the internal and external warfare) of the passage under discussion (spec. leg. 3.17–18) suit Greek and Roman descriptions of the Achaemenid, as well as of the Parthian empire. Philo presumably knew of such famous events as Cambyse’s alleged murder of his brother Smerdis (Hdt. 3.30) and Cyrus the Younger’s attempt to dethrone Artaxerxes II (Xen. an. I).

⁴³ Cf. Heinemann (1962) 279. On the question of the authenticity of the works of Diogenes the Cynic see Goulet-Cazé (1986) 85–90. For his views on incest see Philod. (de) stoic(is) col. xviii 20–22 (Dorandi [1982]); for his tragedy *Oedipus* see stoic. col. xvi 29–xvii 4. Early Stoic views on such matters as incest are generally believed to be part of the Stoic inheritance from Cynicism. Hook (2005) comments on the significance of the tale of Oedipus for Diogenes and Zeno, although he downplays (30) the role played by ethnography in the ancient discussions of such issues.

⁴⁴ S. Emp. (adversus) math(ematicos) 11.191–192 (with the commentary of Bett [1997] 205–210, 264–265) and the parallel passage pyr. 3.246; cf. also pyr. 3.205 and 1.160 (SVF I, 256 with III, 745; cf. also III, 743, 744, 746). Bett (1997) 208–210 lists the other ancient references to discussions of incest in Zeno and Chrysippus and comments on the place of these apparently outrageous views in the philosophies of both.

⁴⁵ For Chrysippus as a collector of the customs of different nations see the account of the burial practices of various peoples (including Persians and Magians) which Cicero derives from him (Tusc. 1.45.108 = SVF 3.322). The defence of Oedipus in Dion Chrys. or. 10, one of the „Diogenes Orations“ (dated by Jones [1978] 136 to c. AD 100 or later), also contains a reference to Persian marital practice (or. 10.30). Although the use of these discourses of Dio as a source for Cynicism is problematic (Billerbeck [1996] esp. 211–213), there is surely some reflection of Cynic ideas in this work (cf. Hook [2005] 29). The linking of Oedipus and the alleged Persian custom at a later date by Tertullian has already been mentioned. The reference to Oedipus in Lucan’s denunciation of the marital customs of the Parthians (Lucan. 8.406–407) should also be noted.

⁴⁶ Although pyr. 3.205 does not refer specifically to Oedipus, it gives part of what is elsewhere (pyr. 3.246 and math. 11.191–192) related of Zeno’s defence of Oedipus and of Chrysippus’ approval of such unions.

But the tale of Oedipus is not the only issue which connects this passage of Philo with Sextus. In both authors, for example, we find the misleading simplification which makes Persia an alleged haven for son-mother unions (but no other type of next-of kin alliance) and Egypt a land of sibling marriages.⁴⁷ We should note, too, Philo's interest in the children of son-mother alliances and his statement that the Persians consider them to be most noble (*eugenestatos*) and worthy of the highest sovereignty (spec. leg. 3.13). A recent scholar has stated that this claim is not inconsistent with Iranian beliefs as recorded in the very much later Pahlavi texts,⁴⁸ and there is of course no inconsistency. However, for a parallel we can turn again to Zeno, for Zeno according to Sextus (math. 11.191 and pyr. 3.246) described the children of Oedipus and Iocasta as noble (*genaious*).⁴⁹

In short, Philo's entire denunciation of Persian incest resembles an attack on the Cynic-influenced ideas of some unknown earlier author. This is not a description of contemporary Persian practice, nor of course can Philo be said to be in any way better informed than our other sources. The lingering account (spec. leg. 3.15–19) of the consequences of son-mother marriage for Greece and for Persia – the fratricides, the wars internal and external – blatantly exaggerates (cf. Colson [1937] 483). The entire discussion is hopelessly imprecise. The only names to occur are Oedipus, Laius and Thebes (3.15). No individual Persians appear, no Persian place-names.⁵⁰ But the imprecision itself is of course significant. Philo's concern here is with the superiority of Jewish marital laws. He has no interest, any more than any other author referred to above, in the historical realities. He is repeating at much greater length than most the stereotypical views of the Greek and Roman world in general.

We now turn briefly to Clement of Alexandria. His sneer at Persian education in the *Paedagogus* (1.7.55.2) has as its target a very similar group to that of Philo.⁵¹ Here he refers specifically to the sons of the Persian kings. It is the education of these that

⁴⁷ Spec. leg. 3.13–19 versus 3.22–25; cf. S. Emp. pyr. 1.152 (and pyr. 3.205) in the account of the 10th Mode of Scepticism. (It should be noted that Philo was very familiar with the Modes and preserves a version of them, including what is Mode 10 in Sextus, in *De ebrietate* 169–205; see Annas/Barnes [1985] 26–27, 151–180.) Cf. too, as noted above, Min. Fel. 31.3, who (like Phil. spec. leg. 3.22) also refers to Athenian sister-marriage, although he fails to state that this was marriage between half-siblings (with the same father). Philo (cf. Sen. apocol. 8) distinguishes the Athenian unions from Egyptian marriages of both full and half-siblings (with the same mother or father). Possibly he follows the source that provided his information on Persian incest. At any rate he presents the standard Greek belief (cf. in particular Diod. 1.27.1) that sibling-marriage was a practice of the Egyptians in general from early Pharaonic times – a misleading view (cf. Huebner [2007] 23–24); solid attestations are limited to half-sibling marriage in royal families (see below Appendix I).

⁴⁸ De Jong (1997) 428, who regards Philo's claim as unique in Greek literature, but does not provide an exact parallel in the Iranian texts. He cites merely chapter 8 of the *Pahlavi Rivāyat* (cf. n. 7 above), a passage which describes next-of-kin marriage only in general terms as a means of enhancing an individual's spiritual merit, creating love and driving out evil.

⁴⁹ Chrysippus, too, according to Sextus (pyr. 3.246), talks of the procreation of children (*teknopoieisthai*) by close family members (cf. *paidopoieisthai* in pyr. 3.205), and not, as in most texts which refer to Persian practices (cf. above n. 26), of a sexual relationship or marriage.

⁵⁰ Philo is clearly much more concerned with the unholy practice (*anosourgēma* is used three times in the passage – at spec. leg. 3.13, 3.14 and 3.19) than he is with the precise identity of the evil-doers. For additional examples of Philo's use of myths to illustrate his moral position see Mosès (1970) 64 n. 2.

⁵¹ There is no obvious influence of Philo here, although he is an author of whom Clement makes extensive use (see, for example, Osborn [1998] and the literature that he cites in nn. 1–4).

deserves blame, since it does nothing (or so he asserts) to keep them from sexual intercourse with „sisters, mothers and innumerable other women, both as wives and concubines“. Like Philo, too, he surely derives his information from the past, from authors writing about the sons of the Achaemenid kings rather than about the sons of contemporaries, the Parthian rulers. We noted earlier a comment of his on the Achaemenid period, namely his citation of Xanthus in the 5th century BC for next-of-kin marriage among the Magians (strom. 3.11.1).⁵² Elsewhere (*protrepticus* 4.65.1), on the question of Persian sacrifices, he cites the 4th century BC historian Deinon (FGrH 690 F 28), whose other interests include, as we shall see, the sexual improprieties of the Achaemenid court. In the passage under discussion, when he begins his attack on Persian education, he clearly draws on descriptions of the Achaemenid period. On this topic he borrows both from Herodotus and from the *Alcibiades* 1 of Plato. To be more exact, he carefully adapts statements of the two authors for his own ends, omitting anything that could be given a favourable interpretation.⁵³ Here again there is no new information on Persian marital practice. Clement is merely purveying the traditional slanders.

The tales of specific next-of-kin alliances in the Achaemenid royal family and in other noble families remain to be treated. However, to sum up the first part of the discussion, the testimony that we have considered so far appears to present little more than a stock illustration of Persian 'barbarity', each author borrowing it from a predecessor. There is some variation in the details, little interest, however, in exactly who indulges in such habits, little sign too, as the centuries pass, of new and genuine information, and nothing in the post-Achaemenid comments reviewed here which makes it necessary to see them as descriptions of contemporary practices.

Some scholars, to be sure, believe that next-of-kin marriages took place among the Magi.⁵⁴ However, since Xanthus is obviously a sensationaliser and later authors appear merely to repeat what their predecessors stated, the evidence is hardly convincing. As for the supposed practices of those described simply as „Persians“, it is tempting to assume that these are based merely on what was alleged of the Magi and of the royal family. Such claims certainly do not prove that alliances with very close kin were wide-spread in Achaemenid Persia. Had they been common-place, we surely would have had some allusion to this in Herodotus, for whom Cambyzes' sister-marriages (Hdt. 3.31; discussed below) were entirely unusual, or in such authors as Xenophon, Plato or at a later date Strabo.⁵⁵ What we do possess, however, is excellent evidence of a firmly rooted and persistent conviction on the part of Greeks and Romans that Persians in their sexual and marital behaviour were utterly depraved. This conviction explains in part how easily some

⁵² Here again Clement links next-of-kin marriage with promiscuity, as he does in *paed(agogus)* 1.7.55.2. In the latter passage he adds for good measure that the behaviour is animal-like.

⁵³ For Clement's habitual editing of his sources to suit his purposes see Kingsley (1995) 180–181 and Osborn (1998). Here he omits the reference in Hdt. (1.136) to telling the truth. The four royal tutors of Persia (much influenced by Platonic theorising) appear in Plat. Alc. 1 121e–122a (on the Platonic authorship of this dialogue see Denyer [2001] 13–26).

⁵⁴ E.g. Bidez/Cumont (1938) 78, Sidler (1971) 119–122, Kingsley (1995) 179.

⁵⁵ Strabo (see above n. 38) refers only to Magian son-mother unions (in 15.3.20, in the section drawn from literary sources). Tuplin (1996) 167 notes that in Athenian authors references to non-mythological next-of-kin marriages are rare.

of the tales, commented on in the following pages, could come into being and be believed.

Part II: Next-of-Kin Unions of Named Individuals

From general allusions to sexual relationships between close family members we move to the unions of the named individuals in Iran that our sources report. Before we do so, however, a few words should be said about the theme as a literary theme in classical authors.⁵⁶

As is well known, tales of sexual encounters between very close kin are told of many others besides Persians. They are, moreover, found in all genres of Greek and Roman literature, including historiography, and in all periods, becoming especially popular in the Hellenistic era. Although they occur most commonly in connection with gods and heroes,⁵⁷ they are also related of powerful mortals (men and occasionally women) — of some Greek tyrants, for example, a group which has attracted tales of sexual perversions of all kinds.⁵⁸ Hippias after all, or so it is said, shortly before landing at Marathon on his return to Attica, dreamed that he slept with his mother (Hdt. 6.107). According to some authors, Periander went farther; he actually did so, it is alleged.⁵⁹

Similar tales, too, are attached to a number of Near Eastern rulers of pre-Achaemenid times. Two alleged Lydian examples were noted above in part I. In addition, in Herodotus' account of Egypt, there is the story of king Mycerinus and his rape of his daughter (2.131).⁶⁰ Of even greater interest, however, in the context of the present discussion is the theme as it occurs in accounts of the famous Assyrian queen Semiramis, for it is found seemingly only in the later versions of the tale. In the first part of the fourth century BC, in Ctesias, the earliest author, it would appear, to provide an elaborate narrative of Semiramis' entire career (FGrH 688 F 1 = Diod. 2.4.1–2.20.2), she is merely a queen of voracious sexual appetite. However, by the time of the mythographer Conon in the Augustan era she is involved in a sexual relationship with her son, thus initiating, so Conon says, the custom of son-mother marriage in Media and Persia (FGrH 26 F 1.9 = Phot. *Bibliotheca* 186).⁶¹ Such alterations to the story usefully remind us that the incest

⁵⁶ For some examples of probably historical, rather than literary, half-sibling marriages in the Greek and Macedonian worlds in the 5th and 4th centuries BC, see Vêrilhac/Vial (1998) 94–95. These are, however, infrequent, occurring primarily in ruling dynasties or other elite families.

⁵⁷ Discussed, for example, by Rudhardt (1982). For the theme in the pre-Hellenistic period see Trenkner (1958) 58 n. 1 and Lightfoot (1999) 242–245. Stith Thompson (1957) 383–385 (T 410–T 415.7) gives references to folk-literature with this motif.

⁵⁸ See in particular Holt (1998). On political slander involving accusations of incest cf. above n. 16.

⁵⁹ Parthenios, *amatoriae narrationes* 17; Diog. Laert. 1.96; cf. Plut. mor. 146d. It is not certain how old the story is; Herodotus attributes other sexual misdeeds to him, but not this one. For detailed discussion see Lightfoot (1999) 482–489; cf. Vernant (1982). For the incest dream see also Plato's tyrannical man (rep. 9.571c–d) and the dream attributed to Julius Caesar (Plut. Caes. 32.9; Suet. Iul. 7.2). For other prominent Greeks and Romans who were accused of incest see, for example, Cox (1989) 40 with nn. 21–22 on Cimon, Alcibiades the Elder and Alcibiades the Younger; cf. for Rome, Tatum (1993) on the allegations against Gellius, P. Clodius and Cicero, and also Barrett (1996) 54 and 182–183 on those against Caligula and Nero.

⁶⁰ Cf. also in the period before Cyrus the Great in Ctesias the Saka queen Zarinaea, whose first husband is her full or half-sibling, the Parthian king Kudraios (FGrH 688 F 7 = Anon. de mul. 2), our only reference to this marriage; cf. Gera (1997) 85–86.

⁶¹ See Mignogna (1998) and Brown (2002) 97–102. In Iust. 1.2.10 she seeks to have sexual intercourse with her son and is killed by him; cf. also Aug. civ. 18.2, Oros. 1.4.7 and, in the 6th century AD, Agathias *historiae* 2.24.2–3. In these authors Semiramis takes the initiative, reversing normal gender roles (as she does in

theme may have little to do with an original tale or with the historical facts. It may be a story-teller's device, a motif included to pique the reader's interests, if not for a variety of other reasons. Clearly this has to be borne in mind when we examine the alleged next-of-kin unions of the Achaemenid period to which we now turn.

i

Two marriages of very close family members are reported for the first one hundred years of the Persian empire (up to about the middle of the fifth century BC). These are the ones said to have been contracted by Cambyses (530–522 BC) with two of his sisters. Both unions are mentioned in the story in Herodotus (3.31), alluded to above (end of part I), in which Herodotus emphatically states that before the reign of Cambyses marriage to a sibling was not a Persian custom.

One of the two alliances was to a sister who is never named, but is described as the younger one (3.31.6) and as a full sibling (3.31.1).⁶² Allegedly, Cambyses did away with her at a later date in Egypt. However, as many have observed, the account of her death (3.32), the second part of this tale, is certainly hard to believe. The parallels, for example, with the story of Smerdis, Cambyses' full brother (3.30.1),⁶³ also supposedly murdered by the king, are unsettling. Herodotus even notes that two accounts are given of her death, just as two are given about the demise of Smerdis (3.32.1). More disturbing yet is the general context of the tale. It is part of Herodotus' narrative of the mad acts of Cambyses, an account clearly influenced strongly by Egyptian propaganda against the conqueror from Iran.⁶⁴

Equally hard to believe, however, is the first part of Herodotus' story. This describes how Cambyses came to marry his sisters and his farcical consultation of the royal judges on whether this was permissible (3.31.2–5). Here, as has often been pointed out, there are striking parallels with tales found elsewhere in the „Histories“. Herodotus draws attention to the judges' fear of losing their lives; his Cambyses is a typical despot, only too ready to deal out death to any who oppose him.⁶⁵ His passionate love (*ērasthē*), too, reminds us of the passion of a series of rulers — that of Candaules (1.8.1), of Xerxes (9.108.1 and 2; 113.2) and of others as well. As in their case, it leads to a scorning of societal norms (*nomos*) that will eventually lead to disaster.⁶⁶

most activities). The same story of incest, but with the son taking the lead and with some other variations, is also found in a series of Byzantine chronicles: e.g. Ioh. Mal. 18 (Dindorf); Chr. pasch. 1.67 (Dindorf); Cedrenus 1.28 (Bekker); and cf. Capomacchia (1986) 27–29.

⁶² The second sister, also unnamed here, is Atossa. Brosius (1996) 45–47 rejects both unions, but most scholars accept them as historical, although they are divided on the question of which sister was the first sibling-wife. Those who accept the opinion (ad loc.) of Sayce (1883) and Legrand (1939) believe that this was Atossa. However, the view of Stein (1870) and Asheri (2007) and others that she was the murdered sibling is surely preferable. This interpretation enhances the pathos of the murder story, making it no doubt more attractive to Herodotus' informants.

⁶³ Bardiya in Darius' account in the Bisitun inscription (DB I §10, Kent [1953]) and also a full sibling.

⁶⁴ As is rightly emphasised by Brosius (1996) 45–47. Cf. on Herodotus' account of Cambyses in Egypt Lloyd (1988) and Briant (1996) 66–72.

⁶⁵ On the conventional traits ascribed by Herodotus to autocrats see in particular Gammie (1986) and Lateiner (1989) 163–186. Text references to those with a propensity for murder are given in the latter's tables (173 I B 4 and 177 II B 4).

⁶⁶ *Erōs* (and its cognates) in Herodotus is associated only with tyrants or kings. In its literal sense it occurs also in connection with Mycerinus (Hdt. 2.131.1) and Ariston (6.62.1); see among others Benardete (1969) 137–138 with n. 9 and Hartog (1988) 330. On the Candaules and Xerxes episodes see the recent com-

The story clearly involves a pattern that Herodotus found appealing, but which could well be largely fictional. However, even if we dismiss much of what he relates in the two parts of the tale (3.31–32), this does not mean that we can turn to Ctesias to solve the problems. Photius' summary of this author is meagre. We do not know how many wives Cambyses had in Ctesias' account or whether any were sisters. In the summary only one marriage-partner is mentioned – a woman named Roxane (FGrH 688 F 13.14).⁶⁷ Although her family is unknown, there is nothing to suggest that she is a sibling. Moreover, we have no guarantee that the tale which Ctesias serves up here is any more accurate than that of Herodotus.⁶⁸

Nor for that matter even if we largely disbelieve Herodotus' account, does this mean that no part of it is based on what actually happened. Cambyses, as at least one scholar has suggested, perhaps married a half-sibling, rather than a full sister.⁶⁹ This was certainly in later years a permissible form of union in Persia (cf. below), and the hypothesis makes it easier to explain how Herodotus' tale arose.

Likewise we should not automatically reject Cambyses' second sister-marriage as wholly untrue. Herodotus alludes to this one in several contexts. He notes it initially in the parenthetical comment (3.31.6) in the tale that we have just discussed. He refers to it later (3.68.4), giving the sister the name Atossa, in the account of the unmasking of the Magian usurper. Although this story is obviously in large part fiction, not every detail (the names of Cambyses' wives, for example) need to be false.⁷⁰ In 3.88.2 we find a third allusion, a passing one. Herodotus' subject here is Darius, not Cambyses, and the passage, which again names Atossa and which provides credible information about Darius' marriages,⁷¹ deserves to be taken seriously. Moreover, Atossa is nowhere stated by Herodotus to have been a full sister of Cambyses.⁷² She could well have been another half-sibling and the marriage, like the earlier one, a means of preventing a rival noble family from increasing its power and influence thanks to a marital alliance with the family of Cyrus.⁷³

ments of Flower/Marincola (2002) 291–300 and of Larson (2006) 236–239 with the literature cited there. On *nomos* in general in Herodotus see Lateiner (1989) 126–144 and 145–162; for references in the text to its violation see his tables (175 I C 9 and 179 II C 9).

⁶⁷ Some scholars, with insufficient justification, identify her with Herodotus' nameless sister; e.g. Dandamaev (1990) 727; Balcer (1993) 285; Lenfant (2004) LXXIV; cf. Schmitt (2006) 185. Strab. 17.1.5 (cf. Ios. ant. Iud. 2.249) calls her Meroe, no doubt a fiction to explain the place-name; in Diod. 1.33.1 Meroe is said to owe its name to Cambyses' mother.

⁶⁸ Brosius (1996) 46–47 prefers it, with its Roxane, to Herodotus. However, although oriental material is clearly present in what Ctesias reports of Cambyses (see Lenfant [2004] LXVII–LXXV), in his account of early times in general (up to and including the Persian Wars at least) he is particularly unreliable, and often in error over questions such as names; see Bigwood (1976) esp. 6–10 and 19–21; Lenfant (1996) 373–379; Lenfant (2004) CXXIV–CXXVII; Schmitt (2006) 54–66.

⁶⁹ Wieschöfer (1996) 84 in fact suggests that both sister-marriages were to half-siblings.

⁷⁰ Pace Brosius (1996) 60. For a suggestion that the name „Phaedyme“ (Hdt. 3.68.3) possibly appears (in Elamite form) on a hitherto unpublished Persepolis tablet (along with that of Cambyses) see Henkelman (2003) 147–148.

⁷¹ On which see Brosius (1996) 47–64 and 193–194.

⁷² If, as suggested above (n. 62), the second marriage in Hdt. 3.31.6 is that to Atossa, Herodotus' tale does not even imply that she is a full sister, although this is often assumed, e.g. by Dandamaev (1990) 727; Briant (1990) 91; Brosius (1996) 36 and 45; Ogden (1999) 126.

⁷³ In Herodotus' tale (3.31) the two marriages belong to Cambyses' reign before the Egyptian expedition (i.e. between 530 and c. 525 BC). Cambyses did not, however, according to Hdt. 3.88.2 marry a third sister Artystone (possibly also a half-sibling and possibly too young for her marriage to be a pressing concern);

Whatever the truth of Cambyses' marriages, they are the only next-of-kin unions reported for the earliest years of the Persian empire. There is no evidence for a third such liaison, as proposed by some – an alliance of the younger brother of Cambyses with Atossa. It depends after all only on the hypothesis (not always accepted) that the Magian usurper, well-known from Darius' account of events (in the Bisitun inscription), as well as from Herodotus, was in reality Cambyses' brother.⁷⁴ Our only source, however, for Atossa's marital career before her alliance with Darius is Herodotus. Moreover, according to Herodotus (3.68.3–5 and 3.88.2), her second marriage (after the one to Cambyses) was to the Magian, not to the younger brother, and it took place after the brother's death. The two versions, indeed, of what happened conflict in regard to a number of details. They cannot simply be conflated; the identification of the Magian and Cambyses' brother, as well as much else that occurred at the end of Cambyses' reign, is obviously wholly uncertain. Given all the difficulties, surely an alliance of Atossa with her second brother cannot be accepted as a securely attested marriage of kin.⁷⁵

ii

For the reigns of Darius I (522–486 BC) and Xerxes I (486–465 BC), a period in which a considerable amount is known about the royal family and other noble families, there is no evidence for any marital alliance of close relatives. In the following period, however, in the approximately one hundred years from the middle of the fifth to the middle of the fourth centuries BC, we hear of a number of next-of-kin unions or sexual encounters, some of them credible, some at best doubtful, some clearly fictitious. Two are reported by Ctesias, an unreliable witness, as we noted, about early times, but more frequently plausible in regard to the later part of the fifth century BC and the period of his stay in Persia.⁷⁶ Of these the first one is not to be doubted, although its date is uncertain. This is the alliance of the half-siblings Darius II and Parysatis, both children of Artaxerxes I but by different „Babylonian“ women (FGrH 688 F 15.47),⁷⁷ and a marriage that allegedly produced thirteen children, of whom five survived to reach adulthood (F 15.51).

The second liaison belongs to the following generation and occurs in a tale related of one of the highest-ranking noble families, one with close marital ties to the ruling

her first marriage was to Darius. For the Persepolis texts which refer to her estates, and for her importance, see Brosius (1996) 50, 125–127 and Henkelman/Kleber (2007) 167–169.

⁷⁴ For the alleged marriage see Briant (1990) 95; Briant (1996) 144; Herrenschmidt (1994) 117. Cf. also Balcer (1993) 287, who believes, furthermore, in two additional unattested alliances (of Cambyses and his brother with Artystone), both in conflict with Hdt. 3.88.2 and otherwise implausible. The identification of the Magian with Cambyses' brother is defended by Briant (1996) 111–113, among others. Pelling (2002) 128, giving a list of other dissenters, rejects it as does West (2007) 407.

⁷⁵ If accepted, it would not necessarily be a marriage of full siblings (cf. above n. 72).

⁷⁶ See Lewis (1977) 20–21, 70–82; Briant (1996) 605–606, 1003; Lenfant (2004) CVI–CVIII.

⁷⁷ The mother of Parysatis, Andia (for the reading see Lenfant [2004] 135), has a Babylonian name (Schmitt [2006] 221). This lends some support to Ctesias' description of her as Babylonian; cf. Kosmari-dene (mother of Darius), whose name, although not yet fully explained (Schmitt [2006] 246–247), has a Semitic appearance. The date of the marriage, usually thought to belong to the 440s, depends on the year of birth of Artaxerxes II, for which we have conflicting evidence; see Lewis (1977) 135 n. 154 and Tuplin (2004a) 320 n. 50; cf. also Stevenson (1997) 75–76 and Lenfant (2001) 417–418. The Greek accounts of Parysatis are discussed by Brosius (1996) 110–116 (for her estates see 123–124, 127–128). Texts referring to her property date from 424–413 BC, with apparently another dating to 395 BC (Jursa/Stolper [2004] 351).

family. Here we learn that Teritouchmes, son of Idernes (Hydarnes), falling passionately in love (*erōn*) with his sister, the beautiful and talented Roxane, arranged eventually for the brutal murder of his wife (a daughter of Darius II) and led his satrapy in revolt against the king (F 15.55–56).⁷⁸ In this colourful story, which ended with the elimination of a large part of Teritouchmes' family,⁷⁹ the true causes of the rebellion and most of the details remain wholly obscure. Indeed, it is not even clear from Photius' summary whether Ctesias referred to an actual marriage between Teritouchmes and his sister. We should note, however, in Photius' description of the latter, the words *homopatRIA* [...] *adelphē* (F 15.55). If there was some sexual or marital relationship between the pair, this was again an alliance between half-siblings with a different mother.

In the story of Teritouchmes the infamous Parysatis plays a baneful role behind the scenes. Two further incest tales, however, concern her directly. Both appear only in late sources and are surely inventions. One is found in Aelian (late second or early third century AD) and records the evil love for her (*ephilei* [...] *kakōs*) of her son Cyrus the Younger and she for him (Ail. nat. 6.39).⁸⁰ The other, which alludes to an unfulfilled wish rather than to an actual sexual encounter, is related by Agathias (2.24.4) in the sixth century AD. Here Parysatis, imitating the much earlier queen Semiramis, desires a sexual relationship with her oldest son (Artaxerxes II) but is rejected.⁸¹ Both tales possibly embroider on an earlier account (for example, that of Ctesias FGrH 688 F 17 = Plut. Art. 2.3; cf. F 16.59 [Phot.]), describing Parysatis' preference for her younger son. Later authors could well have added the motif of incest, just as they seemingly added it to Ctesias' story of Semiramis (cf. above).

Parysatis again plays a part, although indirectly, in one of the three following stories, all of them, like the preceding pair, very hard to believe. All three are found in Plutarch's Artaxerxes, a masterpiece of stereotyping with its scheming women, equally repulsive men and sexual licence in abundance.⁸² Two concern Artaxerxes himself (Art. 23.3–6 and 27.8–9) and are tales of his alleged marital career after the death of Stateira (his first wife, it is usually assumed). Although the relevant dates of the supposed marriages are uncertain, the biographer is apparently thinking of the period not too many years after

⁷⁸ A double marriage linked two children of Darius II, Artaxerxes II and Amestris, to two children of Idernes, i.e. Stateira as well as Teritouchmes (FGrH 688 F 15.55), and was possibly Idernes' reward for support given to Darius II in his bid for the throne (cf. Briant [1996] 607). On the form of his name see Schmitt (2006) 160–163. However, his identity is uncertain; it is unlikely that he is the father of Tissaphernes (see Lewis [1977] 84–85; cf. Briant [1996] 607 and 1003).

⁷⁹ The king no doubt felt a need to get rid of a potential rival (Briant [1996] 607). For the theme of fatal passion cf. Herodotus' tale of Cambyses (discussed above). Sancisi-Weerdenburg (1987) 41–42 comments on the story's similarities to the tale of Masistes (Hdt. 9.108–113).

⁸⁰ Accepted as a genuine relationship by Bidez/Cumont (1938) 79 (apparently) and by Herrenschmidt (1994) 122 n. 11. The source of the story was probably not Ctesias, as Briant (1996) 1011 and Lenfant (2004) 290 n. 776 suggest. Aelian clearly drew on others (it is not certain how many) besides Ctesias. He cites Ctesias' successor Deinon in Ail. var. 7.1 and nat. 17.10 (FGrH 690 F 7 and F 22), for example, and relates a number of anecdotes about fourth century BC Persia which could not have come from the earlier historian.

⁸¹ Discussed by Cameron (1969–70) 92–93.

⁸² Schmidt (1999) 315–324 comments on the stereotypically barbarian characteristics of Artaxerxes and others in this work. On Plutarch's negative views of the love-affairs and intrigues of the royal family see Stadter (1995) 224–225 and Briant (2003) 424.

Stateira's death (c. 400 BC),⁸³ and he bases himself here, in all probability, on the Persian histories (now lost) of two fourth century successors of Ctesias. One is Heracleides of Cyme, the other Deinon (cf. above n. 80), father of Cleitarchus, the well-known historian of Alexander. Deinon's tale concerned Artaxerxes' passionate love (*erōntos erōta deinon* – Art. 23.2) for his youngest daughter, Atossa, whom at the urging of Parysatis he finally married (Art. 23.3–5).⁸⁴ According to Heracleides, however, the king married not only Atossa, but also, at an earlier date, her older sister Amestris (Art. 23.6 and 27.8–9 = FGrH 689 F 7a and F 7b).⁸⁵

These stories, it has recently been suggested, could be the result of a misunderstanding of some change in the status of one daughter or both.⁸⁶ However, they could also be wholly fictional. That the two authors should disagree on whether there was one marriage or two is certainly troubling. One account or both must be wrong. Equally disquieting, too, however they are to be explained, are the similarities to Herodotus' tale of Cambyses (discussed above). In Herodotus we have the king's illicit passion for one of his sisters and royal judges who pronounce that the king can do whatever he wishes (i.e. that he is the source of law). This becomes in Deinon the king's illicit passion (*para ton nomon* – Art. 27.2) for a daughter, with the queen-mother (Parysatis) reminding him that he has been divinely appointed to be the law.⁸⁷ Deinon seems to have depicted Artaxerxes as the originator of father-daughter marriage in Achaemenid Iran, just as the Herodotean Cambyses is the originator of brother-sister alliances. Heracleides' account, too, although we know even less about it than about Deinon's version, obviously reminds us of Cambyses, for here we have the marriages of two royal daughters.

There are other disconcerting details as well, for Deinon's story is part of his problematic account of the final episode in the career of the satrap Tiribazus, an individual whom he treats with much favour elsewhere in his history.⁸⁸ Artaxerxes, as Deinon apparently related, had promised one of his daughters in marriage to Tiribazus, then gone back on his word, marrying her himself.⁸⁹ It thus provides Tiribazus with a motive for

⁸³ His first reference to them follows an allusion (Plut. Art. 23.1) to the death of Tissaphernes (395 BC). Both alliances (the mother of neither daughter is known) are questioned, although not rejected, by Brosius (1996) 66–67, 69, 195, 205, and we have no information about other wives of Artaxerxes II. The brother of the king's wife in Xen. an. 2.3.17 is probably a brother of Stateira; the members of her family were not necessarily all eliminated (see Ctesias FGrH 688 F 15.56), or all eliminated by the date implied by Xenophon (cf. Briant [1996] 607).

⁸⁴ Deinon (FGrH 690) is probably Plutarch's main source for Art. 23–30 (Stevenson [1997] 24–25), but his contribution cannot be wholly separated from that of Heracleides (Schwartz [1905] 654), and the relative dating of the two histories is uncertain. For much useful discussion of both see Stevenson (1997) *passim*; for Deinon see also Stevenson (1987). She does not, however, question the veracity of the tales of the father-daughter marriages.

⁸⁵ There is no evidence of any kind for a marriage of Artaxerxes II and his sister, an earlier Amestris (cf. above n. 78), as suggested by Justi (1895) 14 (s.v. Amastris 3); cf. 323 (s.v. Teritouchmes), and 398.

⁸⁶ Wiesehöfer (1996) 84–85 has conjectured that after the death of Stateira, Atossa might have been awarded, or might have assumed, the position of „wife of the king“, as Greeks seem to have described the mother of the king's heir; cf. Brosius (1996) 186–188 for the leading position of the queen-mother or the mother of the designated heir.

⁸⁷ Her advice to Artaxerxes (Plut. Art. 23.5) to disregard Greek opinion and law (whether it derives from Deinon or Plutarch) sounds very Greek.

⁸⁸ See in particular Stevenson (1987) 32–35 and (1997) 12–13, 48–63, who suggests that Deinon may have been indebted for information to a source close to Tiribazus.

⁸⁹ There can be little doubt that this was what Deinon said, although Plutarch draws on Heracleides for at least a large part of Art. 27.7–9 (the tale of the two marriages of Artaxerxes).

joining the plot of Artaxerxes' chosen heir (Darius) against his father. The promise of a bride, however, seemingly belongs to the earlier part of Artaxerxes' reign, to the years before c. 387 BC, whereas the defection of Tiribazus occurs (very much later) in the late 360s, the king's final years.⁹⁰ In addition, the story duplicates Darius' motives for plotting against the king, for he too was deprived by Artaxerxes of a woman (in this case the concubine Aspasia) promised by the king (Art. 26.5–27.5).

All in all, Deinon's account of Artaxerxes' marriage to Atossa is highly unsatisfactory. Nor is the apparently similar tale of Heracleides, with its two royal daughters promised in turn as brides to Tiribazus and then withdrawn (FGrH 689 F 7b = Plut. Art. 27.7–9), any easier to believe. Indeed, it seems as if both historians have incorporated in their works similar fabrications, tales circulated by partisans of Tiribazus, portraying the king as a weakling controlled by his passions and by the queen-mother, and depicting the latter as the eager abettor of his depravity. They surely should be rejected.⁹¹

Nor does the third tale of incest in Plutarch's biography inspire a greater degree of confidence. This is another story from Deinon, one linked, moreover, to the tale just discussed. It belongs to the final years of Artaxerxes' reign and involves Ochus (later Artaxerxes III), the youngest of Artaxerxes' 'legitimate' sons, and the above-mentioned Atossa, who was of course a full or half-sibling of Ochus.⁹² According to Plutarch, she was at the time a marriage-partner of Artaxerxes.

Ochus, we are told, promised to marry Atossa if she would help him secure the throne on Artaxerxes' death (Art. 26.2–3).⁹³ Plutarch then adds in a tale that duplicates an alleged clandestine liaison of Artaxerxes and Atossa (Art. 23.3 – surely only a malicious story), that Ochus had sexual intercourse with her secretly while his father was alive (Art. 26.3). Even more troublesome is the inconsistency between Plutarch's account here and an earlier episode, one describing Atossa as grievously afflicted by leprosy (*alphos* – Art. 23.7).⁹⁴ Indeed, Deinon's entire story of the relationship between Atossa and Ochus (another character obviously reminiscent of Herodotus' Cambyses)⁹⁵ seems little other than fictional, whoever invented it. This is an account designed to illustrate the misdeeds of a ruler widely believed by the Greek and Roman sources to

⁹⁰ For the problem see Stevenson (1987) 34 n. 20 and (1997) 61. Plut. Art. 27.7 refers to the marriages of two other daughters of Artaxerxes, one to Orontes (c. 401 BC; Xen. an. 2.4.8; 3.4.13) and one to Pharnabazus (c. 388/7; Xen. hell. 5.1.28). On these alliances see Brosius (1996) 74 and 76.

⁹¹ On the unsatisfactory nature of the evidence for parent-child marriage in other ruling families of the ancient Near East see below (Appendix I).

⁹² To avoid confusion I refer to Artaxerxes III in the following pages as Ochus rather than by his throne-name Artaxerxes.

⁹³ Brosius (1996) 67 n. 45 seemingly rejects a marriage of Ochus and Atossa. Indeed, no ancient source attests an actual marriage of this pair, although some scholars (e.g. Olmstead [1948] 489 and Lecoq [1987]) believe in one, erroneously claiming Arses as Atossa's son. Apart from what is said of her in Plutarch's biography, she is unknown; the supposed reference to her in Val. Max. 9.2 ext. 7 is by no means a certain allusion (see Heckel [2006] 274 and n. 738).

⁹⁴ Tuplin (2004a) 331 n. 104 doubts that the illness was leprosy, since Atossa's malady was not apparently 'irreversible'. The original account, however, could well have included a miraculous recovery (although clearly this would not have made the tale more credible).

⁹⁵ In addition to ascribing a sexual relationship with a sibling to Ochus, as well as a savage disposition, Deinon alleges (FGrH 690 F 21 = Plut. Is. 31 [mor. 363c]) that he killed an Apis bull in Egypt – quite possibly a false tale, like that related of Cambyses in Hdt. 3.29; see Stevenson (1997) 139–140 and Henkelman (2007) 20–23, who includes comment on the Egyptian background of the story. For a modern view of Ochus see Briant (1996) 699–709, 1029–1032.

be one of the most vicious of Persian kings, and those of his equally unattractive paramour Atossa.

iii

Finally, from the narratives (ancient and modern) of Alexander's conquest of the Persian empire we have three additional alleged examples of next-of-kin marital alliances. One, that of Sisygambis, mother of Darius III and an important figure in a number of the sources, with Arsanes, a son of Ostanes (one of the sons of Darius II), must be rejected outright.⁹⁶ Although most of the scholars who comment on her marriage claim that she and her husband were siblings,⁹⁷ there is no ancient evidence of any kind for this. Most probably her father was Oxathres, a younger brother of Ostanes; i.e. she was most likely a cousin of her husband, not a sister or even a half-sister.⁹⁸

One of the marriages of Darius III, on the other hand, is referred to by a number of ancient authors, although it is by no means problem-free. This is the marriage to Stateira, whom many believe to have been a full sister of Darius and thus a daughter of Sisygambis and Arsanes.⁹⁹ Our sources, however, while emphasising that she was Darius' sister (*adelphē* or *soror*), nowhere suggest that Sisygambis was her mother.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, even in the pathetic descriptions of Stateira's death in captivity, the only term which defines the link between the two women is the word *socrus* (mother-in-law) in Curtius (4.10.19), a strange word to use of a biological mother. The lack of reference to the mother-daughter bond is all the more peculiar in that the sources, or at least Curtius (4.10.19) and Plutarch (Alex. 21.6), leave no doubt about the relationship between Stateira and her two daughters.¹⁰¹ Stateira was surely not a full sister of Darius, but at most a half-sister by a different mother.

Our last alleged next-of-kin marriage takes us outside the Achaemenid royal family to east Iran and is that of the commander of one of the rock-fortresses captured by Alexander in 328 or 327 BC. According to Curtius (8.2.19), this dynast, whom he names Sisimithres (cf. Strab. 11.11.4 and Plut. Alex. 58.4), and who is often identified with the Choriene of

⁹⁶ For Sisygambis see in particular Berve (1926) 356–357 n. 711, Heckel (2006) 251 and, for a detailed discussion of the alleged sibling marriage, Bigwood (in preparation). The queen-mother is named only by Diod. and by Curt. Arsanes, son of Ostanes appears in Diod. 17.5.5. For Ostanes (and his brother Oxathres) see Ctesias FGrH 690 F 15a (= Plut. Art. 1.2) and Schmitt (2006) 177–178, 180–183 (cf. 227–228).

⁹⁷ E.g. Neuhaus (1902); Berve (1926) 356 n. 711; Hamilton (1969) 78–79; Briant (1996) 792–793 and others.

⁹⁸ Cf. Bosworth (1980) 218, who rejects the sibling marriage, and also Heckel (1997) 137; in his prosopography (2006) 251, although he indicates his reservations about the sibling theory, he does not repeat the suggestion of alliance with a cousin.

⁹⁹ E.g. Berve (1926) 362 n. 721; Hamilton (1969) 78–79; Nylander (1993) 147; Briant (1996) 793 (genealogical table). Others do not distinguish between a full and a half-sibling relationship; e.g. Fiehn (1929); Bosworth (1980) 217; Wiesehöfer (2001). Brosius (1996) 67–68, however, rightly argues that they were half-siblings, a possibility accepted by Heckel (2006) 255–256. On Stateira (given this name only in Plut. Alex. 30) and also on Sisygambis, but without discussion of the issue of next-of-kin marriage, see, in addition, Carney (1996); Carney (2000) esp. 93–97; Briant (2003) 395–426, 585–587.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Brosius (1996) 68. Ancient sources: Plut. Alex. 30.3 and 30.10; Arr. an. 2.11.9; Iust. 11.9.12; Gell. 7.8.3; she is not described as a sister in Diodorus, or in Curtius (except by emendation in Curt. 3.12.22; see the *apparatus criticus* of Bardon [1947–48]).

¹⁰¹ The suggestion of Badian (2000) 251 that the two daughters were children of an earlier marriage lacks support in the sources. For this earlier union (with a sister of Pharnaces; Arr. an. 1.16.3 and Diod. 17.21.3) see Heckel (2006) 274 F 5.

Arrian (an. 4.21.1–10),¹⁰² fathered two sons by his own mother. The same details are found in the Metz Epitome (19), which follows a very similar tradition and which adds that the union also produced three daughters. Should we believe in this marital alliance?

Arrian, who has much less to say about women in general than the vulgate tradition of Alexander, makes no reference to any wife. Curtius, on the other hand, emphasises the unthinkable nature of the union, mentioning it before he provides other information about Sisimithres, and drawing attention to it not once but twice (Curt. 8.2.19 and 28). In the Metz Epitome (19) it is the only item reported about Sisimithres apart from his surrender to Alexander. Many modern commentators, too, accept their claims, harbouring no doubts apparently about the marriage.¹⁰³ However, it is hard not to see this story, like the tale of Spitamenes' wife which follows very closely (in Curtius and in the Metz Epitome), as one designed to emphasise the barbarity of the tribesmen of east Iran. The son-mother marital alliance and other details (e.g. the „manly“ woman, „womanly“ man motif, so popular with Greek and Roman historians)¹⁰⁴ could well be inventions on the basis of commonly held beliefs about Iranian peoples.

Conclusions

It is time to summarise the results of the preceding analysis and, so far as the evidence permits, to draw some conclusions. Thirteen alleged next-of-kin marriages or sexual relationships have been discussed at greater or lesser length. Two, however, namely the supposed union of the younger brother of Cambyses with Atossa and that of Sisygambis with Arsanes, should be discounted. The evidence for them is modern speculation alone.¹⁰⁵ For the remaining eleven our information, it should be kept in mind, comes not from documents but only from stories, ones, moreover, in which stereotypical elements can be difficult to ignore. A number, for example, illustrate what many in the Graeco-Roman world thought of as a characteristically Persian or barbarian weakness — namely, lack of self-control in regard to sex.¹⁰⁶ The tales of Cambyses, Teritouchmes, Artaxerxes II and Ochus are of this type and also exhibit one and the same general pattern, that of passionate love which ends in disaster.¹⁰⁷

The stereotypical features naturally do not enhance the credibility of the alleged relationships and some of them are surely unworthy of belief. Five of the eleven are between parent and child. According to my review, the two between father and daughter (those of Artaxerxes II), the only ones of this kind attested for the Achaemenid period, can legitimately be questioned. Even greater doubts are raised by those involving son and mother, the type so prominent, as was indicated in part I, in the general statements of our

¹⁰² See Berve (1926) 354 n. 708, Heckel (1986) and Heckel (2006) 250. Bosworth (1995) 135 believes that the two are separate individuals.

¹⁰³ E.g. Lane Fox (1973) 316; Orsi (1987) 297; Atkinson (2000) 490; Lenfant (2004) 289–290; Heckel (2006) 250 and 276 F 26–29.

¹⁰⁴ For this motif see Heckel (1997) 148 and Briant (2003) 412 and 587. For Sisimithres' alleged cowardice cf. also Plut. Alex. 58.3–4. On the story of the wife of Spitamenes see Heckel (2006) 275 F 25.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. also the three additional alleged sibling-marriages, ones wholly unsupported by the sources, which were referred to above (nn. 74 and 85).

¹⁰⁶ Implicit in tales of the Persian court from Herodotus onwards and explicit in comments such as those of Athen. 12.545f and Ail. nat. 1.14; see Briant (1996) 294–295 and (2003) 355–357.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. also the allegations about Parysatis (discussed above), and, in addition, the many similar tales (e.g. Hdt. 9.108–113 on the love-affairs of Xerxes) which do not involve next-of-kin relationships.

sources. The two which feature Parysatis, it was suggested, are fictions of a comparatively late date. The third tale of this type, that of Sisimithres, is scarcely more plausible (cf. above n. 91).

The alleged encounters between siblings, six in all, are more numerous than either the father-daughter liaisons or those of son with mother. The earliest two, however, the marriages of Cambyses, likely involved half-sisters, it was argued, rather than full siblings. This was certainly the case with the alliance of Darius II with Parysatis and the relationship (whatever its nature) of Teritouchmes with his sister. The marriage of Darius III to Stateira was probably the same, while the sixth liaison, that of Ochus with the younger Atossa, was very possibly entirely fictional. In other words, we have evidence, it would appear, for a number of half-sibling alliances. However, there is no incontrovertible testimony, as Brosius (1996) 45–46 has already suggested, for any pairing of full siblings,¹⁰⁸ as well as no trustworthy information about unions of parent and child. If full sibling or parent-child marriage had been Achaemenid practices, surely the evidence would have been much more convincing.

The tales that we have been examining (with the exception of that of Sisimithres) must naturally also be considered in the context of what is known about royal marital practices in general in the Achaemenid period;¹⁰⁹ or rather they should be viewed in the context of what we do not know, since, apart from the reign of Darius I, our evidence is very poor. For the period after Darius I, for example, i.e. for the reigns that particularly concern us here, the marital policy of the kings can be traced only in broad outline. In these years, as Brosius (1996) 64–69 indicates, the known spouses of kings are all seemingly Persian – sometimes relatives (including half-siblings) and sometimes daughters of selected noble families,¹¹⁰ the aim of royal marriage being obviously to strengthen the monarch's position and to ensure control by the ruling dynasty. However, the amount of information that we do not possess is vast.

Indeed, although it is normally believed, as noted earlier, that most kings were polygamous, in the case of no successor of Darius I, apart from Darius III, do we have credible evidence for more than a single marriage partner, namely the one who was presumably the principal spouse.¹¹¹ Thus, with the possible exception of the last-mentioned reign, we know nothing about the family origin of all secondary wives. Moreover, for only six of the eleven individuals in this same period who either ruled or were seemingly the chosen successors (i.e. nine kings, plus two princes), do we have informa-

¹⁰⁸ In the following pages it is assumed that all the reported sibling marriages in reality involve half-siblings. On the evidence for brother-sister marriage elsewhere in the ancient Near East see Appendix I.

¹⁰⁹ Discussed in detail by Brosius (1996) 35–82.

¹¹⁰ Although we do not know the family of Damaspiā, wife of Artaxerxes I (Ctesias FGrH 688 F 15.47; Photius' summary does not suggest that she is a sibling), she is likely to be of noble background (Brosius [1996] 64). On her Persian name see Schmitt (2006) 159–160.

¹¹¹ On the two wives of Darius III see above (part II, iii) and n. 101, but it is not known whether the marriages were concurrent or successive. I have disregarded here the alleged daughter-marriages of Artaxerxes II (discussed earlier), and also the second wife assigned to Ochus by Brosius (1996) 67 and 205. She believes that the allusion of Curt. 3.13.13 to „the wife of Ochus and the daughter of Oxathres“ is a reference to one woman – a possible, but not a necessary interpretation of the Latin. The usual view is that Curtius alludes to two separate individuals (see Heckel [2006] 343 n. 738 and cf. the translation of Bardon [1947–1948]). The wife could thus be identical to the sister's daughter referred to by Val. Max. 9.2 ext. 7. In addition to the wives of the king, there are of course the women whom the Greek and Roman tradition calls „concubines“ (whatever their real status), whose sons were not normally eligible to succeed to the throne. On this ill-known group see Briant (1996) 289–295, 946.

tion about the family of the principal spouses, or even about the existence of a spouse.¹¹² Nor, although we hear of some unions involving royal daughters,¹¹³ do our sources reveal much about the marriages of other members of the royal family – royal sons, for example, apart from those who later became kings. In addition, we are very poorly informed about the wives of the nobles in general.

We do not, therefore, know how often marital alliances were made with half-siblings, or with family members less closely related than these.¹¹⁴ Nor do we know what specific reasons there may have been for the half-sibling unions reviewed above.¹¹⁵ Cambyses' aim, for example, as was suggested earlier, may have been to prevent a rival from increasing his influence by intermarriage with the ruling family. However, a similar theory will not explain the later half-sibling marriages, those of Darius II (to Parysatis)¹¹⁶ and Darius III (to Stateira). Neither of these monarchs was king, or even the chosen successor, at the time of the marriage; Darius III, indeed, belonged to a collateral branch of the royal family, not the main line. In each case the union predated the king's accession by a considerable period of time.

The two last-mentioned alliances suggest that half-sibling unions were perhaps unobjectionable in the Achaemenid royal family as a whole, outside the narrow group of kings and heirs, and possibly also among the nobles.¹¹⁷ Still, it is obvious that we have insufficient information to deal adequately with the motives which lay behind them, and indeed with many issues in regard to marital practice in the Achaemenid period. On the other hand, the general nature of the evidence that we do possess is abundantly clear. As we have seen, whether Greek and Roman authors make overall pronouncements about Persian marriage or refer to specific alliances, there is much exaggeration in what they re-

¹¹² We know (or at least have some information about) the family of the wives of Xerxes I, his son Darius (on whether he was the designated heir see Briant [1996] 583), Darius II, Artaxerxes II, Ochus, Darius III. On Damaschia, wife of Artaxerxes I see n. 110 above. The sources fail to report wives for Xerxes II, Sogdianus (Diod. 12.71.1; Scyrdianus in Ctesias FGtH 688 F 15.50; on his name see Schmitt [2006] 272–276), Darius, heir of Artaxerxes II, and Arses (we hear of children in the case of the last two).

¹¹³ Discussed by Brosius (1996) 70–78; 189–190. Like the wives of the kings, the known spouses of their daughters (before Alexander's campaign) are Persian. If this reflects reality, in the avoidance of marriage alliances with foreign rulers, the marital policy of the monarchs of these years differs from that of at least some later dynasties – the Ptolemies and Seleucids, for example, and also the Arsacids (at least those of the last 150 years BC); see below (Appendix I).

¹¹⁴ In the period under consideration we hear of two unions of the latter type, that of Darius, son of Xerxes I, to his cousin Artaynte (Hdt. 9.108.1) and that of Ochus, married, according to Val. Max. 9.2 ext. 7, to a niece (daughter of a sister whose identity is unknown; see above n. 93).

¹¹⁵ The reasons for the practice of brother-sister marriage in those ruling families of the ancient Near East, where it is securely attested, no doubt varied according to dynasty and cultural background, although the primary motive was surely to preserve the family's power. For two recent discussions which deal with general explanations, as well as with a specific dynasty, see Ager (2005) 16–22 on the Ptolemies and Carney (2005) 79–85 on the Hecatomnids of Caria. On the unconvincing suggestion that royal Achaemenid marriages to close family members owe their origin to Elamite practice see below Appendix I.

¹¹⁶ Apart from this alliance, we have no information about the marriages of the children of Artaxerxes I; according to Photius' summary of Ctesias (FGtH 688 F 15.47), he had eighteen sons, seventeen of them „illegitimate“ (i.e. presumably represented as sons of „concubines“; cf. above n. 111). Our sole additional source is an interpolation in Xen. hell. 2.1.8–9, which has suggested to some that a nameless sister or half-sister of Darius II was married off (outside the immediate family) to Hieramenes; see Lewis (1977) 104 with n. 83; cf. Schmitt (2002) 53–54.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Briant (1996) 347, but there is no evidence apart from the tale of Teritouchmes and his half-sister (discussed above). The evidence for parent-child marriage among the élite (only the story of Sisimithres) is even weaker.

port and much that derives from mere prejudice, and we should not be misled by this. If the royal marriages did not in reality involve kin more closely related than half-siblings, they were not essentially different, it should be acknowledged, from what could be found in the Greek world and in Macedonia in the fifth and fourth centuries BC, particularly in ruling families (cf. above n. 56). A further point is worth noting as well. So far as can be judged, the pattern of kin-marriages in the Achaemenid royal family is quite distinct from that found later on among the rulers of Ptolemaic Egypt. In the latter dynasty, it is often believed, eight of the twelve kings from Ptolemy II Philadelphus to Ptolemy XIV married siblings, in many cases full sisters.¹¹⁸ In Iran, however, according to my reckoning, for only three of the twelve kings from Cambyses to Darius III, or rather for only three of the eight for whom the sources indicate marriage partners, do we have reliable evidence of marriage to close relatives, in all cases probably half-siblings.¹¹⁹

It should be emphasised of course that we have no information about marriage between close family members among ordinary Persians in the Achaemenid period, as I provisionally stated at the end of part I. All the alleged examples occur in the ruling class, almost all of them in the royal family or closely connected families. This suggests that when Greek and Roman authors comment in purely general terms on the marital peculiarities of Persians, they allude, when they are not thinking of Magians, to the ruling class only. As was observed in part I, Philo and Clement of Alexandria refer specifically to this latter group. As for the role of religion in these marital habits, our sources tell us nothing about actual alliances of named Magians, although, as was also indicated in part I, they commonly attribute next-of-kin unions to this group. In regard to the marriages of members of the royal family and other upper class families, there is no evidence that Zoroastrianism or any other religion played any role. Dynastic, political or economic motives will adequately explain the alliances that occur.

Appendix I: Next-of-kin Marriage in the Ancient Near East

Next-of-kin marriage of the kinds discussed above is alleged of many other Near Eastern rulers besides those of Achaemenid Iran. The following outline makes no claim to deal comprehensively with such a large subject. Rather, it provides brief comments on what is known about such practices in major dynasties in both pre- and post-Achaemenid times, drawing attention to how little solid documentation exists for some widely-held modern beliefs.

Royal incest has been thought to have been common in two areas in particular in the centuries before Cyrus the Great, namely in Pharaonic Egypt and in Elam. As regards Egypt, however, it is now clear that sibling marriage was much less frequent than often claimed in the past, for recent scholarship has discredited the old, unsubstantiated, ma-

¹¹⁸ For this figure see Carney (1987) 435 (cf. the list of marriages in Seibert [1967] 84 n. 45). However, it should be viewed as an approximate one only; there are many inconsistencies and gaps in the evidence and much scholarly disagreement on details. For recent discussion of Ptolemaic genealogies see Ogden (1999) 67–116; Ager (2005) 3–8 and in particular Bennett (1997) and (2001–2006).

¹¹⁹ The twelve kings include the Magian pretender, for whom our information is incomplete, and also Xerxes II, Sogdianus and Arses, whose wives are unknown (see n. 112 above). The wife of Artaxerxes I, on the other hand, has been assumed to be a non-sibling (cf. above n. 110). It should also be noted that since the marriages of Darius II and Darius III were apparently made well before they came to the throne, they are different from Ptolemaic sibling marriages. According to Bennett (1997) 44–45, the latter normally took place on the king's accession and were part of his claim to godlike status.

triarchal' theory,¹²⁰ on which such a claim is based. Indeed, although kings certainly married half-sisters from time to time, there is disagreement about whether full sibling marriage was ever a practice of the Pharaohs.¹²¹ As for the supposed father-daughter marital alliances of this period, these too are a matter of considerable dispute. Some (including Robins [1993] 15, 29–30) consider that the titles „wife“ and „great wife“, given to a few daughters of kings, imply consummated unions. However, it is wholly uncertain whether a sexual relationship was involved, or whether the titles reflected status at the court or some ritual function (Dodson/Hilton [2004] 29, 35, 146, 148, 169).

Marriages of siblings or half-siblings are also attested in the Elamite royal family, although the evidence suggests that they were rare (see Malbran-Labat [1995] 176 and Brosius [1996] 38–39), rather than on the large scale formerly claimed.¹²² Moreover, despite what is sometimes stated, there is no plausible documentation for parent-child alliances. The alleged marriage of Nakhunte-Utu and her father in the 12th century BC (see, for example Vallat [1997] 67–68, who also refers [68] to an equally hypothetical marriage of Nakhunte-Utu and her son) is rejected by others.¹²³ The conjecture (by Waters [2000] 26–27) of another father-daughter union some four centuries later also fails to convince, given the absence of scholarly agreement on the dates of individual kings (see, for example, Tavernier [2004]) and on family relationships. All in all, although some have theorised that the origin of Achaemenid next-of-kin marriage lies in Elamite practice,¹²⁴ too little surely is known about the latter for meaningful discussion of influence.

When we move forward in time to the period of the Achaemenid empire and the following years, we are dealing with evidence for marriage within the family which is in some cases less slippery. In the 4th century BC, for example, during the Achaemenid years, two sibling alliances are certainly attested in the Hecatomnid dynasty in Caria (see now Carney [2005]). However, although these are usually considered to be unions of full siblings (e.g. by Hornblower [1982], Carney [2005] and others), we have no evidence that this was in fact the case (cf. Vêrilhac/Vial [1998] 94 n. 171). Nor, given how little plausible documentation there is for Achaemenid sibling marriage, does it make much sense to suggest that the example of the Achaemenids played a major role.¹²⁵

In post-Achaemenid times, too, some forms of kin-marriage are well documented. There is no doubt, for example, as indicated above, that in Egypt a considerable number of the Ptolemaic kings from Ptolemy II Philadelphus onwards married full or half-sisters;¹²⁶ they were clearly comparatively reluctant to become involved in potentially trou-

¹²⁰ That right to the throne was transmitted via the female line; i.e. that to be considered legitimate the king had to marry the „heirss“, who was often a sister or half-sister. For the rejection of this hypothesis see Robins (1993) 26–27 and Dodson/Hilton (2004) 16–17.

¹²¹ Robins (1993) 27 and 74 accepts it; Lloyd (2003) 403 notes the lack of solid evidence (cf. Huebner [2007] 24).

¹²² E. g. by Hinz (1973) and others; on the controversy cf. Kuhrt (1995) 374. Theories of „matriarchy“ have played a baneful role in regard to Elam, as well as Egypt.

¹²³ See Grillot (1988) 655–667 and Malbran-Labat (1995) 173 with n. 246.

¹²⁴ E. g. Cameron (1936) 20; cf. Schmitt (2005) 373. Brosius (1996) 38–39, however, argues against this view.

¹²⁵ Cf. Carney (2005) 79, arguing against the suggestion of Hornblower (1982) 360–361, and cf. nn. 126 and 129 below.

¹²⁶ Kornemann's belief (1923) 25 that the Achaemenids provided the model has rightly been rejected by most scholars; see Carney (1987) 433. On the lack of good evidence for sibling marriage among commoners see Černý (1954) and the other scholars listed by Huebner (2007) 26 n. 54. In addition, if Huebner (2007) is right that the records of Roman Egypt suggest wide-spread adoptions rather than

blesome marital alliances with outside rulers.¹²⁷ On the other hand, there is no persuasive evidence for the alliances of parent and child in this dynasty that have sometimes been alleged.¹²⁸

From time to time, too, sibling marriage occurred in the Seleucid dynasty (although again not marriages of parent and child), the Ptolemies being the likely model.¹²⁹ However, such alliances were relatively infrequent, the Seleucids making much more effort than the Ptolemies to bolster their power by intermarriage with neighbouring dynasts.¹³⁰ Despite Ogden's claims, the earliest certain sibling union was that of Laodice, daughter of Antiochus III, to her oldest brother Antiochus (c. 195 BC). Moreover, she cannot, as is often asserted, have married three brothers in succession rather than one.¹³¹

Later, in Iran under the Arsacid dynasty, at least in the last one and a half centuries BC, the kings, as well as making marital alliances with outside powers, sometimes married half-siblings. Although sources are scanty, there is documentary evidence for the marriage of one monarch of this period to two half-siblings (and also, in the following century, for the half-sibling alliances of one or two non-royal citizens of Doura-Europos). However, we have no unequivocal testimony for unions of full siblings; the one additional royal marriage, as well as the remaining non-royal ones (all of these attested by documents), involve individuals who could be either half- or full siblings.¹³² The same uncertainty exists in regard to the known sibling alliances of the earlier Sasanian kings. Brosius (2006) 173, for example, refers to two brother-sister unions, noting that it is not clear whether or not these were full sibling marriages.

In both the Arsacid and Sasanian dynasties we also have no plausible evidence for parent-child marital alliances. The single alleged Arsacid example, that of Mousa and her son Phraatakes, although accepted by most commentators,¹³³ is based on wholly inadequate documentation (see Bigwood [2004]). With regard to the supposed marriage of

alliances of biological siblings, this casts serious doubt on whether the latter were a feature of the post-Ptolemaic era.

¹²⁷ Daughters of Lagid kings were of course sometimes married off to foreign rulers, especially Seleucids, as Seibert (1967) 84 notes. However, his list of marriages (84 n. 45) shows how few kings took spouses from ruling families outside Egypt.

¹²⁸ See the detailed account of Bennett (2001–2006) „Ptolemy IX“ n. 32; „Ptolemy XI“ n. 4; „Berenice III“ n. 12, rejecting the supposed marriage of Ptolemy IX to his daughter and that of Ptolemy XI to his mother.

¹²⁹ As supposed by Schmitt (2005) 374, rather than the Achaemenids, as suggested by Kornemann (1923) 25 and by Ogden (1999) 125–126.

¹³⁰ On their marital policy see Seibert (1967) 46–71; cf. Sherwin-White/Kuhrt (1993) 126.

¹³¹ On the confused references in the sources to half-sibling marriages of Antiochus I and Antiochus II see Walbank (1957) 501, rather than Ogden (1999) 124–125; cf. also Martinez-Sève (2003) 697–698 on the family of origin of Laodice, wife of the latter king. On the marriage of Laodice, daughter of Antiochus III, to one brother only see Grainger (1997) 50 (Laodike no. 15), and Boiy (2004) 156–157; Ogden (1999) 134–136 accepts the three-brother theory. On the marriage (often conjectured) of Demetrius I to his sister Laodice, after the death of Perseus of Macedonia, her first husband, see Hoover (2000).

¹³² On the marital strategies of the kings of the last 150 years BC see Bigwood (2008) 259–265 (on the next-of-kin marriages see 260–262, where reference is made to several which are based on scholarly invention, not documentary or literary sources). In roughly this same period, as is well-known, sibling-marriage allegedly occurred in a number of other ruling families as well: e.g. in Pontus (Iust. 37.3.6–7); Armenia (Tac. ann. 2.3.5); Adiabene (Ios. ant. Iud. 20.18). Again, it is not clear whether or not full siblings were involved, and the frequency of the practice is uncertain.

¹³³ Including recently Huber/Hartman (2006) 495; Lerouge (2007) 340–341 and Strugnell (2008), none of whom looks closely at the ancient evidence for it.

Shapur I and his daughter Aduranahid in the early Sasanian period, a number of scholars¹³⁴ have pointed out that her title „queen of queens“ may refer to her status among the royal women; it does not necessarily imply marriage to Shapur „king of kings“.

In short, it should be clear from this brief review that the evidence for parent-child unions is flimsy in general, not merely in the case of the Achaemenids. It should also be clear that the frequency of solidly attested sibling marriages, in particular those of full siblings, has been exaggerated in a number of ruling families, and not in the Achaemenid royal family alone. Obviously our sources of information deserve more careful scrutiny than they have sometimes received.

Appendix II: Next-of-kin Sexual Relationships in Achaemenid Iran

The following list of sources, which does not claim to be exhaustive, includes the more important general references in Greek and Roman authors (many of them discussed in part I). The appended letters s (= sister) d (= daughter) m (= mother) indicate the type(s) of relationship to which allusion is made: Xanthus FGrH 765 F 31 = Clem. Al. Strom. 3.11.1 (s d m); *Dissoi Logoi* (90 Diels/Kranz) 2.15 (s d m); Ctesias FGrH 688 F 44a = Tert. nat. 1.16.4 (m) [cf. FGrH 688 F 44b = Tert. apol. 9.16]; Antisthenes in Athen. 5. 220c (s d m); Sotion in Diog. Laert. 1.7 (d m); Catull. 90 (m); Strab. 15.3.20 (m); Phil. spec. leg. 3.13–19 (m); Plut. mor. 328c (m); Dion Chrys. or. 10.30 (m); Lukian. sacr. 5 (s); Tatian. ad Graec. 29 (m); [Tert. — see above under Ctesias]; Diog. Laert. 9.83 (d); S. Emp. pyr. 1.152 (m) [cf. pyr. 3.205]; Clem. Al. paed. 1.7.55.2 (s m) [cf. also above under Xanthus]; Min. Fel. 31.3 (m).

The post-Achaemenid authors included above (some dating to a period as late as the end of the 2nd or early 3rd century AD) almost certainly depend on much earlier information. For references to later sources, some of which include allusions to post-Achaemenid practice see Scheidel (1996) 166.

The more important references to specific Achaemenid marriages or sexual relationships (discussed in part II) are as follows: Hdt. 3.31; Ctesias FGrH 688 F 15.47 and F 15.55; Curt. 8.2.19; Plut. Art. 23, 26, 27; Arr. an. 2.11.9; Ail. nat. 6.39; Agathias 2.24.

Summary

Greek and Roman authors often state that it was allowable for Persians to marry mothers, daughters and other very close relatives, claims that many modern scholars accept as valid for the Achaemenid, as well as for later years. This article re-examines the ancient sources for such marriages in the Achaemenid era, both the general statements and the tales of specific unions, and argues that the evidence for marital alliances between parent and child, and those between full siblings, is exceedingly weak. It thus lends support to the views expressed by Brosius in her brief discussion of the issue, views which others have ignored or even rejected.

Keywords: Achaemeniden, Inzest, Persien, Kambyses, Darius I, Xerxes I, Artaxerxes I, Teritouchmes, Parysatis, Tiribazus, Ochus, Sisygambis, Darius III, Atossa, Stateira

¹³⁴ E.g. Huyse (1999) 107; Brosius (2006) 173; Weber (2006) 281–284.

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